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# LOFTY ASPIRATIONS

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by Elaine Weeks

Upon arriving at the stately St. Genevieve Place Lofts, one question may immediately arise: should one enter by the Girl's entrance or by the Boy's?

Until about ten years ago, St. Genevieve Place served as St. Genevieve Separate School. Today, the only reminders of its former educational function are the engraved limestone reliefs above (Boy's) and west (Girl's) entrances and the front entrance.

Located at 647 Irvine Avenue, just south of Tecumseh Road between Marentette and Howard Roads, the school was most recently a children's centre.

When that venture folded a few years ago, the building caught the attention of a pair of enterprising Real Estate agents. Remo Valente and his son Peter of Valente Real Estate knew the building was worth acquiring, even if they didn't know what they were going to do with it.

According to Peter, the initial plan was to build a senior's type condo, but as they looked into the idea further, Peter decided that the building was perfect for lofts.

"This is an excellent building," says Peter, "all brick, concrete and steel construction. It seems that in our City the buildings that were constructed the best were the schools."

St. Genevieve was built in 1929 and designed by John R. Boyde, a notable local architect whose other work included Precious Blood Church on Tecumseh Road East and the Russian Orthodox Church on Drouillard Road. Boyde was a senior partner in the firm Pennington & Boyde in the 1920s and 1930s. Their work included such prominent Windsor buildings as Walkerville Collegiate (1922), the Jackson Park gates (1931)

and Metropolitan General Hospital (1926).

This is the first loft conversion project to be undertaken in the City of Windsor. A total of 15 suites (six lofts or two-story units and nine 1-story urban flats) are in the works. Attractively priced between \$96,900 to \$142,900, ten units were sold in the first two weeks of sale.

Purchasers include several first time homebuyers like Michael Houston, Director of Recruitment at the University of Windsor. "I had admired the lofts in Toronto where they are very

thought it would be quirky to live in a school since I work in a university!"

Other Purchasers include young married couples and seniors who like the thought of no maintenance as well as the proximity to Tecumseh and Howard for shopping.

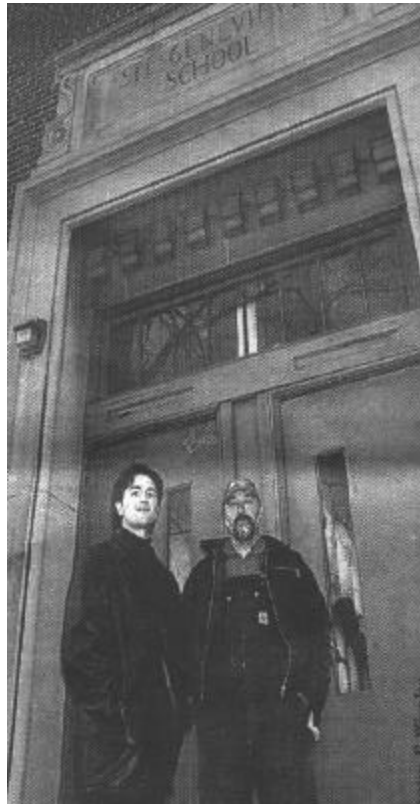
The spacious units are an inventive blend of old and new: all have high ceilings (up to 15' in some) and feature state-of-the-art windows, wiring and hardware. The original birch flooring in the second and third floor units has been restored while new hardwood and ceramic flooring grace various areas in all units.

Valente met with the neighbours prior to initiating renovations to inform them of his intentions. One concern raised by the neighbours was parking as most don't have garages or driveways. Valente assured them that this would not be a problem since he was converting the playground into a parking lot with room for 28 vehicles.

According to Glen Carroll, head of construction for the project, the neighbours have been very cooperative. "As we had to take out the interior walls, we've been without water for a while. One neighbour has been kind enough to allow us to hook up a hose to his outdoor tap," says Carroll.

Interior designer Meghan McCurdy is working with buyers to help them choose colours and fabrics in order to create a total look for their units. "Even though the units are unfinished, people have been able to immediately see themselves living here. They love the fact that it is such a unique development," says McCurdy.

Valente is interested in pursuing additional loft projects. "If anyone has a building that they want to sell in Walkerville or think is suitable for lofts, we would come and take a look and



*Peter Valente and Glen Carroll at front entrance*

common and when I discovered that these were available, I called immediately," recalls Michael. "I

possibly get into a joint venture with the owners.”